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COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE

Twenty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)* OF THE 459th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 1 May 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. BURNS

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document CAT/C/SR.459/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS (agenda item 2) (continued)

Contribution of the Committee against Torture to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

1. Mr. HUSBANDS (Secretariat of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance) said that the document prepared by the Committee as a contribution to the World Conference would be submitted to the Preparatory Committee for the Conference at its second session, to be held from 21 May to 1 June 2001, in English only. The Conference Services Division of the Secretariat, responding to a document forecast by the World Conference secretariat of a total of 1,200 pages, had called for a reduction of two thirds in the number of pages submitted for translation into the working languages of the Conference. The Conference secretariat had thus reluctantly decided to submit for translation only those documents produced at the four regional intergovernmental preparatory meetings and the five regional expert seminars, since they had served as the basis for the draft declaration and programme of action to be considered at the Conference.

2. Funds had been earmarked to allow a member of the Committee against Torture to attend the Conference, and a second member might be authorized to attend if additional funds were made available. Representatives of the Committee would have the status of observers both at the second session of the Preparatory Committee and at the World Conference, which entitled them to speak and make proposals on any agenda item.

3. The World Conference would be accompanied by a number of parallel events, including formal and informal panels, to which members of human rights treaty bodies would be invited, and a forum for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whose proceedings the treaty-body experts would also be welcome to attend.

4. Ms. GAER said that when the Committee had adopted the document containing its contribution to the World Conference at the previous session, she had been informed that it would shortly be submitted for translation into the working languages of the Conference. It was incomprehensible that the Secretariat had been unable, in the intervening six-month period, to arrange for the translation of fewer than half a dozen pages, especially since the Organization was now offering to send one or two members of the Committee to attend the Conference in South Africa. The document contained, inter alia, the important message that, in the Committee's judgement, racial discrimination and other forms of intolerance were a breeding ground for torture.

5. Mr. HUSBANDS (Secretariat of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance) said that the funds for travel to meetings were being provided by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, while those for translation depended on the overall workload of the Conference Services Division.

6. Ms. GAER said she could only conclude that little store was set by the contribution of the treaty bodies, an attitude that conflicted with recent statements by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the High Commissioner for Human Rights. She asked what action was contemplated to remedy the situation.

7. Mr. HUSBANDS (Secretariat of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance) said that he would convey the Committee's concerns to the Conference Services Division.

The public part of the meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.